not only were the two structures emblematic of the new politics of the Front Populaire, but they also synthesized the architect’s principles of social architecture. He went on to concentrate on complex projects, responding to the massive urban operations undertaken in connection with the exhibition. In association with Georges-Henri Pingusson, Mallet-Stevens took part in all the important competitions of the 1930s, and proposed monumental solutions. Although none of their projects was built, they were visionary concepts. The war and a serious illness put an end to all of the architect’s important activity. After several years of refuge in the south of France, he died in Paris in 1945, leaving behind a sketchbook with drawings from Penne-d’Agenais (1940–44) and the manuscript “The Reconstruction of the Devastated Regions” (1944).

The exhibition clearly confirmed that Mallet-Stevens contributed to the development of the concept of modern architecture. As Giedion observed, he was more preoccupied with an “aesthetics of representation” than with the social issues debated by the modernists. However, the cultural elite his clients represented actively contributed to the shaping of modern architecture. Mallet-Stevens was an inventor who, particularly in his “paper architecture” and his ephemeral exhibition pavilions, experimented with new expressions and solutions in aesthetic and technical terms. He was preoccupied by the relationship between architecture and light, not only from a formal point of view, but also from the perspective of hygiene. He effectively argued the idea of a synthesis of arts, another notion specific to modern architecture. Influenced by the Wiener Werkstätte and de Stijl, he favored the association between aestheticism and technicality, as well as close collaboration with industry.

While the exhibition allowed viewers to draw their own conclusions, it did not supply the context that could have situated Mallet-Stevens’s work in a wider architectural framework in France and abroad. It provided limited written information on the work, though glimpses of Mallet-Stevens’s complex personality were afforded by supplementary architectural tours, complementary exhibitions at the villa Cavrois and the Barillret’s studio, and publications. The organizers apparently conceived of the show as part of a whole, and only by connecting the pieces could one get a complete picture. Fortunately the catalogue, edited by the chief curator, Cinquabre, with essays, several texts by the architect, and an exhaustive catalogue of his works, is now undoubtedly the major reference on Mallet-Stevens.

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Publication related to the exhibition:

Notes

Cedric Price—Doubt, Delight and Change
Design Museum, London
25 June–9 October 2005

The location of this modest exhibition—just behind a show on the evolution of the surfboard on the top floor of what can only be described as a dumpy little building perched precariously on the geographical edge of London’s cultural orbit—brought home the dilemma that comes with appreciating Cedric Price (1934–2003). It is no coincidence that this is the same gallery that a year and a half earlier showed a similarly user-friendly show of the equally enigmatic Alison and Peter Smithson (The Smithsons: The House of the Future to a House for Today). To the majority of U.S.-educated architects, myself included, neither Price nor the Smithsons were ever really a factor, let alone an influence or an employer. In London, the reverence for the three, but particularly Price, is priestly. Drop a hint to an architect friend, colleague, or stranger that one is writing on the titanic figure nicknamed CP and everyone has a story to tell, brandy featuring in almost all of them. One wonders, however, how much all the social headiness that surrounds Price is meant to make up for his architectural marginalization. Only in the glory days of the Architectural Association in the 1970s and ’80s, when its inimitable chairman Alvin Boyarsky (1928–1990) turned architectural publishing into pornography, was Price a frequent feature. In a capital city that let loose a load of roosters, including Sidney Kaye, Eric Firmin & Partners, and Gollins, Melvin, Ward & Partners, its cock was cooped up at 38 Alfred Place. To be in Camden and not strutting out of Sydney Cook’s office with a commission was rare indeed.

If it were not for a couple of lords and a sir, the fate of our hero in this show’s warped story would have been dramatically different. Without Lord Snowdon, Price’s one infamous surviving structure—the aviary at the London Zoo (1961), finished before the architect was
even thirty—would not have been built. It is also astounding that one of the few other projects featured in the exhibition was Westpen (1977), a Sir McAlpine commission, presented complete with a model where the plastic sheep steal the show. It was a far cry from the "effective invective" of today's Swiss pinups, Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, who have constructed their fame around building buildings, and whose competing Herzog & de Meuron: An Exhibition was held at roughly the same time at Tate Modern. Westpen was one of only eight projects of Price's on view at the Design Museum, fewer than Herzog & de Meuron squeezed on a single table; in this company, Price is always going to look like a fringe player. Half of the eight are realized works, a dubious way to present an architect who built less than 5 percent, if not less than 1 percent, of his output. Of course "realized" is a relative term; but in a century when one says that Le Corbusier realized Chandigarh and Oscar Niemeyer realized Brasilia, it becomes difficult to judge Price's contribution in the face of such curatorial heavy-handedness. In the harsh light of day, Price's "realized" work on display amounted to only a small gallery (Robert Fraser Gallery [1962]), cattle pen (Westpen), birdcage (aviary, London Zoo), and local community center (Inter-Action Centre [1971]). We all know there is more to Price, but in this exhibition and in face of the comparison with Herzog & de Meuron, you would need special powers to know it. You have to admire Price's resolve, but is that the way to consider him? Architecture students coming to this show would have wondered why he bothered with such projects, given that the fees were so insignificant. Moreover, they are hardly testament to his skill.

The exhibition made it as difficult as possible to stay away from the puzzle of the man and concentrate on the work. The middle of the three small spaces was devoted to a video projection of the loquacious Price giving a lecture titled "Technology Is the Answer, But What Is the Question?" in 1979. It says something of the curators' expectations for the show that all that was provided for watching a nearly 25-minute video was one small square seat designed by Price for the Robert Fraser Gallery. In addition to the neglect of the work, there was also the sense in the presentation that Price was being remade to fit the conventional model of the modern architect: builder, furniture designer, and publisher. The Robert Fraser Gallery is hardly a big idea, but what it has, aside from being built, is furniture.

With all the fanfare that accompanied Herzog & de Meuron's road show of tabletops scattered with all sorts of architectural eye candy, it is bemusing why a strikingly similar but lower-end approach—bright yellow Clarke Contractor bases with plywood sheet tops—was adopted to present Price's work. Unless, of course, one considers the irony of Herzog & de Meuron, as masters of the finished building, deploying the format to avoid exhibiting a finished project, while the curators of the Price show used it to make eight largely cerebral projects seem like the real thing. Is this not contrary to every reason there is to appreciate Price? The similarity between the two exhibitions does not stop there. Both included videos, both offered a tear-off sheet as documentation (at the Herzog & de Meuron show it doubled as a map), and neither of them bothered with a catalogue. Nonetheless,
Price has had more than his share of words since the millennium. There are three recent books, one an important but botched reprint of *Works II* (London, 1984), all of which were for sale, along with a few postcards, in the museum shop.

When it comes to the five other projects that were on display, you can see why Lord Richard Rogers was one of the exhibition’s primary benefactors. If Price does not make the cut, Rogers’s few London buildings are not likely to either. It has been said before, but when you look at the Fun Palace (1960–65) and Inter-Action Centre, you cannot miss Price’s crucial role in establishing Rogers’s position in that fickle pantheon of contemporary architectural history. But their kinship is beyond building. It is Price’s larger ideas that underpin Rogers’s recent work commenting on Britain’s cities. His New Labour–commissioned *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (London, 1999) owes a substantial amount to Price’s thoughts in projects like the Potteries Thinkbelt (1964) and London’s South Bank (1983).

Regrettably, though, it does not advance on Price’s penchant for government documents. Price mastered management-speak and used it in work that was not presented, like the McAppy project (1973), where he collaborated with Sir McAlpine to improve construction site safety in the days before Construction (Design and Management) regulations.

Despite the exhibition’s shortcomings, the eccentricity of the Englishman’s technique and imagery remains a virus that is easily caught, by Europeans and Americans alike. Look at the global effect of the recent Archigram fever; such inventive and insightful drawing as theirs is the hallmark of Price’s wholly original work. Even the perfunctory treatment of this show cannot dim the spirit that found Price struggling like an Old Master to animate a sheep, making charts like a Cambridge scientist, being infected with the humor of a young David Hockney, and, with his ridiculously small model for the Fun Palace made of various household items—including a colander—easing into Alexander Calder’s, or probably more aptly, Eduardo Paolozzi’s, arena of social commentary. What comes off at first as slightly naive—more iconic than architectural—but in which one also sees the later glossy iconoclastic work of Michael Craig-Martin and Rem Koolhaas, is also what makes the madcap drawings of architects of Price’s ilk and generation so infectious. It is a bug to catch; but doing so is going to take a whole lot of work, and probably a trip to Price’s archive at the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

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Publications related to the exhibition:
